



ELS AH HISTORY

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Our first newsletter for 2003 centers on Eliestoun. This follows a taped slide show presented by HEF last October titled "Eliestoun—a gentleman farmer's 'fine country home' of 1890." Our last newsletter on Eliestoun was published in the fall of 1980—twenty-three years ago. It seems right to turn our thought again toward a historic site that has since become very much in need of loving attention.

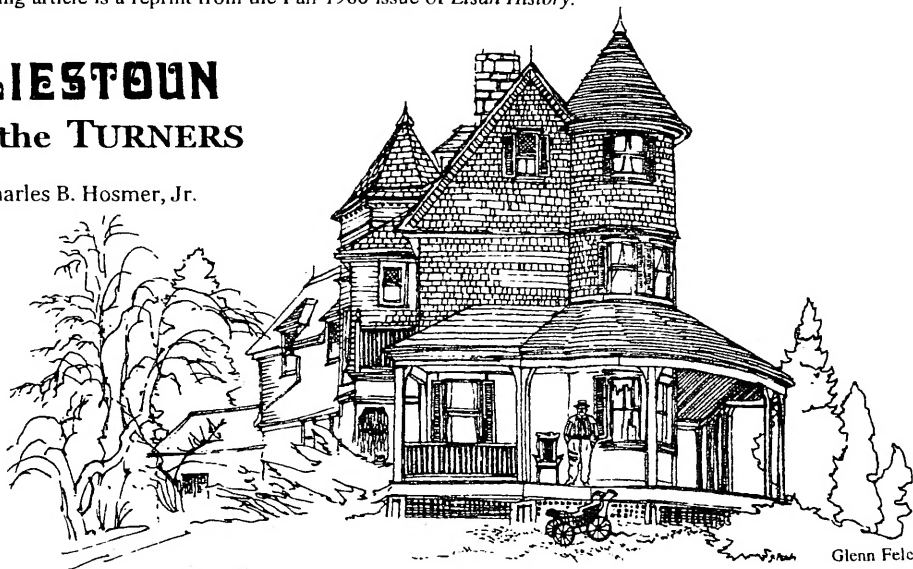
Although Eliestoun is not located in the Village of Elsah, it did play a major role in its history, being built by the husband of the granddaughter of the founder of Elsah. The Principia now owns this property, and we hope the information in this newsletter will be of some small help toward efforts to restore and preserve this treasure.

HEF members and their families are invited to a tour of Eliestoun on Saturday, May 3 (May 10 will be the rain date). Bring your lawn chair and spend a relaxing day exploring the house and grounds. You may either bring your lunch or purchase a box lunch prepared by My Just Desserts. We will close the day with a visit to the Woolly Mammoth dig site (see article on page 8). See the enclosed form for details.

The following article is a reprint from the Fall 1980 issue of *Elsah History*.

ELIESTOUN of the TURNERS

by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr.



Glenn Felch

A simple reference in the deed books for Jersey County dated May 25, 1888, opens a new era for the neighborhood around Elsah. Henry S. Turner, Jr., of St. Louis purchased 422 acres from William F. Leonard for the princely sum of \$10,000. What appears to be an ordinary business transaction marked the formation of an estate that was to include over 600 acres of farmland with a mansion, attendant outbuildings and a park with exotic landscaping. The

results of this great building project are still with us today as a scenic portion of the Principia College campus. Travelers who view the Jersey County bluffland from the Mississippi River or from the air will note the mansion at Eliestoun as the most prominent feature of the countryside.

Henry Turner was not merely a wealthy St. Louisan who had selected a fine piece of property at random. He was a product of a social system that

made it natural and possible for him to build a mansion at the age of 28 on a large and productive farm. Although he listed himself in directories as a "capitalist," Turner derived his fortune from an inheritance that came to him when he graduated from Georgetown University in 1880. That year his father Henry S. Turner died and left him a substantial life income, possibly as high as \$10,000 a year. In October of 1883 Henry Turner, Jr., married Ada Ames, the daughter of Lucy Virginia Semple Ames, at Notchcliff. The wedding party came to Elsie on the steamer *Spread Eagle* to witness the union of two prominent St. Louis families. Newspaper coverage of the Ames-Turner marriage ceremony included extensive descriptions of Mrs. Ames' gardens and house, as well as the text of the marriage contract.

It was natural for a young man who wanted to become a gentleman farmer to look around the countryside above Elsie once he had become a member of the family that owned most of the land that surrounded the village. From time to time the Ames family summered in the East, either at Bar Harbor, Maine, or at Rye Beach, New Hampshire. On one of these trips Turner met Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow, a nephew of the poet. Young Longfellow had just gone into the practice of architecture after spending four years in the offices of Henry Hobson Richardson, the most influential architect in America at that time. Probably the two young men concluded that the spectacular view from the Elsie bluffs called for the kind of shingled resort building that was common along the shores of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Longfellow had a partner in Pittsburgh who must have taken on the direct supervision of the project along with the hiring of a landscape architect. Turner decided to call the property "Eliestoun" in honor of his wife's family. Mrs. Turner's grandfather, James Semple, had named Elsie after a rock in the Firth of Clyde in Scotland. It seemed fitting to refer to the new house as a castle, known in Scotland as "Eliestoun Tower" on Castle Semple Loch.

Possibly young Turner looked upon himself as a medieval baron looking over a hostile world from his fortified manor house. His daughter later referred to Turner as "very proud of being self-sufficient and able to withstand any siege of no matter what duration." Several of the columnists who reported on the construction of Eliestoun mentioned that the house reminded them of "one of the old castles on the Rhine."

Whatever the motives may have been in the construction program, Henry Turner set about the supervision of his estate with remarkable directness. He was able to engage the services of Ernest F. Gehlman, an experienced Springfield contractor. This choice made perfect sense in an era when Elsie's only regular communication with the outside world consisted of a railroad that ran between Grafton and Springfield daily. There was no rail connection with St. Louis. The Jerseyville and Alton newspapers show that the project moved along about as swiftly as one could expect with the technology of the 1880's. The foundation was completed in October of 1889, and by April of 1890 the painters were in the final stages of decorating the interior of the house. The Turners moved into their new summer residence in April with their five-year old son Edgar Ames Turner. As the work progressed reporters noted that a carload of evergreens arrived and that Henry Turner was experimenting with planting young maple trees in clumps that would cause the trunks to join and form one large tree trunk. The columnists did not hesitate to refer to Eliestoun with adjectives like "palatial" and "fine."

In spite of the aristocratic setting designed for the Turner family, the new gentleman farmer quickly endeared himself to local businessmen. On June 26, 1890 the Jersey County *Democrat* editor commented, "He is a very pleasant gentleman





and in our opinion will become popular with the Jersey County people in proportion to the acquaintances he forms. He purchased the James E. Starr farm about three years ago, and is engaged in improving and stocking it with the best blooded cattle and sheep to be had in the country. The beautiful residence he has erected this spring is the most elegant in point of finish of any house in this part of the country. The fact that Mr. Turner is an earnest admirer of Cleveland and Wike, makes him at home with Jersey County Democrats." Within a few years Henry Turner took charge of the sheep department at the Jersey County Fair. He continued to enjoy the praise of the local journalists over the years. They nearly always referred to him as a very pleasant companion and a thorough gentleman.

During the first half of the 1890's Henry Turner worked on the improvement of his estate. During 1891, for example, he constructed a superintendent's house and spent a fair amount of time in the fall drilling a well that could bring water to a house that was hundreds of feet above the banks of the Mississippi. His efforts were crowned with success in November when the drillers struck good water at 900 feet. There was insufficient pressure to bring the flow to the surface, so Turner installed a windmill to bring the water to a point where it could be hand-pumped into a lead tank in the attic of the house. There was no electricity for the house, so the Turners depended upon oil lamps for illumination. There were other difficulties that had to be surmounted in order to turn Eliestoun into a proper estate for a gentleman. The road from Beltrees had to be paved with gravel in order to bring the guests to the farm from the nearest railroad station. This road-building operation required a great deal of care.

But Eliestoun was much more than a notable architectural project or a landscape setting. It was the functioning center of an estate. Marion Turner Allen, who was born at Eliestoun in 1892, remembered that "There was a large herd of Jersey cows, flocks of sheep, pigs, chickens, and a large vegetable garden. My father was especially proud of his asparagus and strawberry beds and the orchards. There were many horses and always a half a dozen dogs." Mrs. Allen went on to comment that these facets of life at Eliestoun made her childhood an ideal existence.

Today we are used to viewing dramatizations on the life of the English aristocracy. Marion Turner looked at everyday existence at Eliestoun from the standpoint of the daughter of a great landowner. Obviously we have to find a way to re-create the outlook of the people who worked so hard to create an ideal setting for the Turners. Over the past fifteen years it has been possible to interview a number of Elsah residents who remember working for the Turners during the thirty years that the family occupied Eliestoun as a summer residence. While we cannot give a complete picture of a working day at the mansion, there are important indications of a life-style quite different from our own.

When the Turner family was in residence at Eliestoun they usually enjoyed the services of a cook, two maids for cleaning the house, a farm superintendent and five men to work on the grounds during the summer. In the winter the staff narrowed to three people working on the farm and the park area within the stone gates. A coachman slept in the stable, and the superintendent remained all year in the farmhouse. During the 1890's Marion Turner had the services of a French governess, and in later years Eva Reintges, a resident of Elsah, helped out as a companion for the Turner daughter. When the

Turners had house guests they found it necessary to hire extra people to drive carriages from the Beltrée railroad station, and the kitchen staff increased in size as well. It is obvious from the size of the establishment maintained by Henry Turner that Eliestoun was an important factor in the Elsie employment situation.

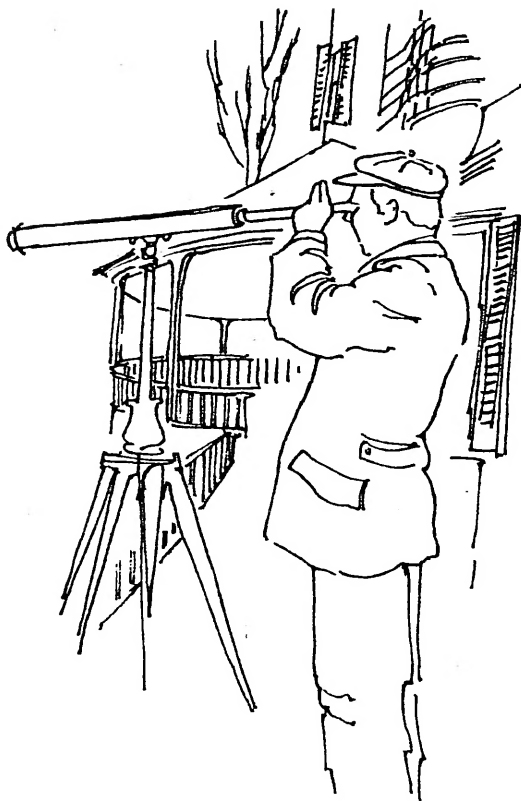
The Turner family set out to enjoy the leisure created by the staff at Eliestoun. Letters, family photographs, and taped interviews give us some idea of the country life of the well-to-do. We know that Eliestoun was ideal for small house parties. There were only a few rooms for guests, but there were frequent gatherings during the spring and summer. We know that some of the parties went hunting and others chose to ride around the estate. Photographs lead us to believe that they enjoyed sitting on the veranda with telescopes looking out over the river.

Eliestoun was equipped with a nine-hole golf course in the later years of the Turner occupancy. Some guests played a form of lawn tennis and others chose croquet. Henry Turner himself spent time inspecting his farm operations and took daily naps in a pagoda-shaped gazebo that was on the hill below the main house. He stopped in his little gothic office at least once a month to pay the workers. Marion Turner had a happy childhood, although she must have been lonely on her Elsie hilltop. She was indulged by the servants when her parents were away, sometimes eating fairly late at night. Eva Reintges remembered dressing up with Marion to simulate a wedding, with the cook acting as the minister. Marion herself remarked in later years that she loved the quiet life at Eliestoun with the diversions that were available to her. All the residents of Eliestoun were able to enjoy the fishpond near the entrance to the park. At one time the pond had been stocked with goldfish, and sometimes the Turners kept beavers in a mound near the water.

There is only one somber note in this otherwise idyllic picture. Ada Turner did not like Eliestoun. Although her photographs give us a great deal of important information about the estate, she did not come often and she did not hide her feelings about the place. When Henry Turner died in 1921 she sold the farm almost immediately. Residents of Elsie found Henry Turner gracious and friendly, but they did not find Mrs. Turner as easy to get to know. Although there is not much indication about the kind of relationship Henry Turner had with his awesome mother-in-law, Lucy Semple Ames, she appears in many family photographs taken at Eliestoun.

Probably Turner and Mrs. Ames were able to get along fairly well because their life styles seem to have been similar.

Today [1980] after two changes in ownership, the Eliestoun estate remains in a good state of preservation. Only an individual equipped with photographs and a good deal of information can enjoy the scanty physical remains of Notchcliff. Eliestoun offers the visitor splendid views of the river valley and many indications of the relaxed atmosphere of the home of a wealthy St. Louis family. The shingle-style vacation home of the Turners remains a useful and ornamental building on the campus of Principia College. It still gives us clear evidence of a world that has long since vanished under the changes that have occurred in our society over the past fifty years. With the exception of the Gate Lodge, Eliestoun is our last visible reminder of the family that founded Elsie and preserved its wooded surroundings for over seventy years. ❧



STATUS OF ELIESTOUN

BY JOHN W. WILLIAMS

"Do you know anyone with a lot of money?" was the immediate response of one senior Principia administrator to the question about Eliestoun and its future.

Eliestoun, perhaps the best example of the "Shingle Style" in the St. Louis region, is located on the eastern portion of the Principia College campus. The house (begun in 1889), outbuildings, and gardens are a mile and half from the center of the college campus. The house was built for Henry S. Turner Jr. of St. Louis. Turner had married Ada Ames, daughter of Lucy Ames (the owner of Notchcliff), and granddaughter of James Semple (the founder of Elsah). Notchcliff was located just west of the center of the college campus.

Principia purchased the Ames and Turner properties, along with others, in 1930. Eliestoun has served as the home of the college president, as a dormitory for unmarried staff women, and as a student dormitory.

Maps indicate the existence of several outbuildings. A large horse barn burned in the early 1970s. A small office, noted for its gothic style, has deteriorated over time. The extensive grounds of exotic or non-native plants have gone wild.

Currently, the house is "mothballed," closed to access and use pending the raising of funds to undertake substantial renovations. As with a number of buildings on the college campus, Eliestoun fell victim to a need to defer maintenance in the recession of the 1980s. In the 1990s it was only because of a strong endowment that the college was able to undertake significant renovation of two of the "Maybeck" dormitories: Anderson House and Rackham Court. The collapse of the stock market in 1999 caused dramatic reassessment of a number of capital construction and renovation projects on the campus.

Furthermore, Illinois state safety requirements, such as wiring for fire alarms and piping for sprinkler systems in dormitories, made the grand mansion financially expensive to keep open. All electrical wiring needs to be replaced and structural problems need to be addressed.

Principia corporation officials believe that restoration of the building would cost around two million dollars. Most colleges are tuition-driven or government-funded and both types are feeling the pinch of the current financial crisis. Principia, unlike these schools, is "endowment-driven." As a private, religious-based college, Principia does not accept federal or state government aid, grants, or support. Only about 20% of its annual operating costs are covered by tuition. Therefore, Principia is particularly dependent on its endowment. The decline of the stock market since early 1999 has caused Principia to reconsider the use of its annual income.

One of the principles used for deciding how to use resources in this time of "tight budgets" has been the centrality of an activity or program to the core educational mission of the school. Activities or programs that are not directly connected to the educational mission must be self-sustaining. In other words, general funds will probably not be available to restore Eliestoun. With the policy of not accepting government funds (adopted in 1976) still in effect, the only financial resource appears to be substantial private donations.

A number of small steps have been taken to preserve Eliestoun. With the permission of the college, a small group of Principia community members have undertaken privately to restore and maintain the small gothic office. Over the past several decades, members of the college's Biology and Natural Resources Department have documented and are working to resurrect the botanical gardens. Other departments are considering alternative educational uses for the building that could attract donations or non-governmental grants. Principia's Development Office has prepared an extensive portfolio documenting the history of the building, grounds and residents, which has been circulated to prospective donors. ☒

Editor's note: If you, or someone you know, would like to receive the portfolio mentioned in this article, please contact John Thompson at Principia's Development Office, 1-800-218-7746, ext 3525

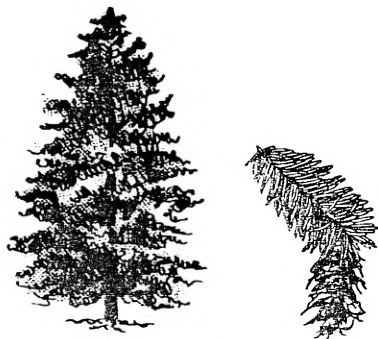
THE TREES OF ELIESTOUN

BY MICHAEL RECHLIN PH.D.

Autumn on the bluffs above Elsie would not seem complete without a trip out to Eliestoun to take in the Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) in its crimson fall foliage. With a blue sky behind, this tree, said to be the largest Japanese maple in Illinois, frames a picture that has attracted visitors from throughout the Midwest. But how many have made that same trip in the spring to photograph the weeping cherry (*Prunus pendula*) in bloom? Many have enjoyed the panoramic Eliestoun vista of the Mississippi without knowing that the evergreen tree on the left was a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) brought in from the Pacific Northwest over 100 years ago. Fewer yet realize that the American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) found growing on the east side of the Eliestoun pond is not found as part of the natural woodlands for 250 miles to the north.



Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)



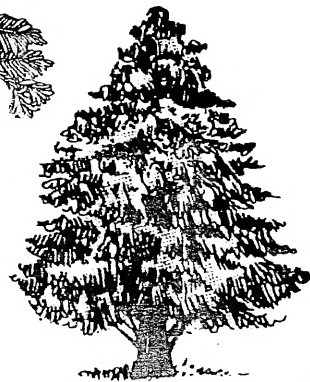
Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)

Henry S. Turner, the builder and first “lord of the Eliestoun manor” had a love for the environment on his section of the bluffs. Turner also had a love for trees. As he built his summer home and named it after the Eliestoun castle of Scotland, he also planted the grounds with trees his workers brought from distant points in America and beyond. The Eliestoun plantings were sculpted to the landscape under the guidance of the early regional landscape architect J. Wilkinson Elliott. Elliott, a contemporary of Frederick Law Olmstead, was part of an American landscape school that broke with the tradition of formal Victorian gardens. Their vision was to design landscapes that worked with the natural lay of the land. An 1890s map of the Eliestoun estate, housed in the Principia College Archives, shows the location of the plantings and their arrangement into natural groupings.

With the help of this detailed map, the Biology and Natural Resources (BNR) Department of Principia College is working to preserve what remains of those original Eliestoun plantings and to plan for their restoration and enrichment. The work began in the spring of 2002 with students cutting back vegetation and vines that were strangling and overtopping some of the original trees. This spring, BNR major John Lovseth of Denver, Colorado, has taken on the job of re-mapping the original plantings and planning for the establishment of a College Arboretum at Eliestoun. This effort is being assisted by our Chautauqua neighbor and friend Tim Tomlinson. Tim is associate director emeritus of the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania. He is working with the department in designing interpretative signs and planning the arboretum project.

Among the more interesting and lesser-known trees in the proposed arboretum are two dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) that were planted by John “Doc” Wanamaker in the 1960s. What makes them so interesting is that they are not supposed to be there, or anywhere else for that matter. The dawn redwoods were thought to have gone extinct thousands of years ago. They were known only from their fossil records until “discovered” in the late 1940s in a rural district in China. Once discovered, it did not take Doc long to get his hands on a few seedlings and add them to the Eliestoun collection.

As the arboretum project moves into action in the weeks ahead, we would appreciate any information you may have about the plantings at Eliestoun. By summer we hope to have many of the trees identified and tagged, adding to the educational value of the property and to the enjoyment of anyone out for a stroll through the grounds of this historic site. ☼



Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)

Editor's note: In March HEF received a letter from Ms. Lauren Long in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Ms. Long is a graduate student in Landscape Studies at Chatham College, where she is doing research on the landscape architect, J. Wilkinson Elliott, who designed the Eliestoun gardens.

Mr. Elliott had written a book, published in 1902, called *A Plea for Hardy Plants* and Eliestoun was one of the gardens featured in the book.

With her letter she enclosed a copy of the two pages from the book that included a map of the grounds and a "Plan for Grounds of Twenty Acres." This was new information for us, and we owe a debt of gratitude to Ms. Long for bringing it to our attention. We are also grateful that we were able to assure her that Eliestoun still existed and was being cared for.



PLAN FOR GROUNDS OF TWENTY ACRES

The accompanying plan is that of the grounds of Mr. Henry S. Turner, at Elash, Ill. These grounds are beautifully situated on a bluff five hundred feet above the Mississippi river, and about thirty miles from St. Louis. The grounds are comparatively level except for a steep declivity on the southern boundary, commencing on a line a few feet south of the house, and a valley commencing at path a, and extending beyond the northwestern boundary of the grounds. This valley is wooded north of the carriage drive which crosses it from b to c. The grounds slope gently to this valley from path d, and from the road from e to f.

The steep declivity referred to above extends about three hundred feet south of the house to a sheer bluff above the river. The house is located to get the full benefit of the magnificent river and prairie view, which is only limited by the power of the eye. The pond was a natural one, the outlines of which have been changed. This pond was retained to provide a place to grow aquatics and bog plants.

The grounds are very elaborately planted with a large variety of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, and promise to become one of the most interesting and beautiful country places in the west. In addition to the ground shown by the plan, Mr. Turner owns several hundred acres adjoining, which is devoted to a stock-farm.

EXPLANATION OF PLAN

- 1, 1, 1. Woods.
2. Steep declivity, planted principally with evergreens, but some open spaces left, in which wild roses and other native plants are naturalized.
- 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. Trees and shrubs.
- 3a, 3a. Shrubs.
4. Trees, principally deciduous, but with a few groups of evergreens.
- 5, 5. Rhododendrons and coniferous evergreens.
6. Large evergreens.
7. Hemlock spruce.
8. White birch and hemlock spruce.
9. Bed of *Arundo Donax* and *Eulalia gracillima*.
10. Path from house to farm, with flower border on both sides, planted with hybrid perpetual roses, herbaceous plants, spring-flowering bulbs, summer-blooming bulbs, and annuals.
11. Summer house.
12. Pump-house.
13. Ice-house.
14. Office.
15. Greenhouse.
16. Lodge.
17. Pond for aquatics, with groups of shrubs and trees planted around it.
18. California privet hedge.
19. Lombardy poplars.
20. Grape-arbor.

We are sorry the map is not sharper, but it does give a good idea of how the grounds were laid out. The Mississippi River and bluffs are to the left of the map. The house is located toward the left, just a little below center. The office, which still stands, is shown at the bottom of the map in the upper left corner of the vegetable garden.

Note the incorrect spelling of Elash as "Elash."

Map and plan reproduced from *A Plea for Hardy Plants* by J. Wilkinson Elliott, 1902

HEF MEETS ELSAH'S OLDEST INHABITANT

By John W. Williams

"Benny" is between 15,000 and 20,000 years old. He was introduced, at least by his tooth and picture, to Historic Elsie Foundation members and friends at a "Fabulous Friday" lecture last fall.

Dr. Janis Treworgy, Associate Professor of Earth Science at Principia College, delivered the November 15, 2002 lecture on *Woolly Mammoth Unearthed*. Her presentation, backed by slides and artifacts, was about this recent discovery on the college campus.

The woolly mammoth is almost 11 feet high at the shoulders, based on measurements of bones being unearthed at the archaeological site. According to Illinois state experts, the large size of the tusks, which may be 10 feet long, establish that the animal was a male. The number of plates on the molar, and the wear on the tooth, indicate that he was in his early forties.

According to Dr. Treworgy, who is directing the scientific dig at Principia, "Our knowledge of mammoths is based on our knowledge of modern elephants." The woolly mammoth, the Asian elephant, and the African elephant are cousins. The mastodon is a different creature, not closely related to the mammoth.

Based on this knowledge and the nature of the teeth, scientists know that the woolly mammoth ate grass. He was a "grazer." The mastodon, on the other hand, ate branches, twigs, leaves, and roots. That animal was a "browser." Scientists estimate that a mammoth ate 300 pounds of vegetation a day and weighed between 6 and 8 tons.

The woolly mammoth lived toward the end of the Ice Age. It had 3 layers of long hair. The outer layer was coarse and about 3 feet in length. The underfur was thinner and shorter, only 10 to 12 inches in length. A thick layer of wool was next to the skin. The skin was padded with 4 inches of fat as insulation. The mammoth had very small ears to reduce the loss of heat. His ears were similar to those of the Asian elephant.

How do we know so much about woolly mammoths? Dr. Treworgy revealed that at least one complete animal has been discovered frozen intact. Scientists are carefully studying it and can even determine what it last had for dinner.

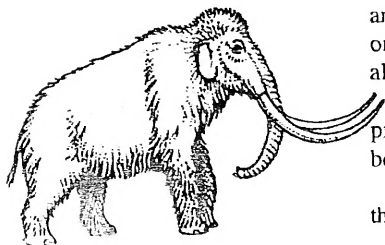
The discovery of Elsie's woolly mammoth was an accident. College backhoe driver Benny White of Grafton was preparing the site for a manhole near Rackham dormitory when he unearthed a strange object. White and others took it to Dr. Fred Marshall, a paleontologist and Professor of Earth Science at Principia. Marshall understood the importance of the discovery as a molar, and this was confirmed by Illinois state specialists.

Supervised digging around the site began in Spring Quarter 2002 and resumed that fall. Principia students, guided by Dr. Treworgy and aided by a number of state and national experts, have located both tusks and the upper jaws, along with many other bones. The students named the animal "Benny," in honor of his discoverer.

At this point, Dr. Treworgy and others have more questions than answers. They do not know why Benny was visiting Elsie. Elsie was only a mile or so south of the edge of the glacier of the Ice Age. They also don't know why Benny died.

Benny has received accolades from state experts as one of the best-preserved woolly mammoths. He is currently the only woolly mammoth being uncovered in the entire state.

The site was covered during the winter, and excavation has resumed this spring. ☒



Mammuthus primigenius

Members of Historic Elsie Foundation are invited to visit the dig site on Saturday, May 3rd following the tour of Eliestown. For those of you who will not be able to participate in the Eliestown tour, you are welcome to join us at the dig between 1:00 and 1:30 p.m.

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

This past January, members of HEF's Board elected me to be their president. My first thoughts were of gratitude for those who have served this organization so notably over the past years, and especially those who preceded me as president: Charles Hosmer, Inge Mack, and John Williams. I feel a special thank-you for Betty Clark who, with exemplary ability and devotion, filled the treasurer's post from 2000 through 2002, and who gave so much in so many ways. Betty has retired from the Board, and she is missed.

I am also grateful for our members. Without the support of our members we would not be able to continue our work. At the moment of this writing Historic Elsie Foundation has 164 members, and since most of them are "Mr. & Mrs." counting spouses would almost double that number. The majority of our members come from Elsie, or close by in Illinois or Missouri. But a goodly portion live in 22 different states, and one lives in England.

Because this report is focused on gratitude, this message would not be complete without including another group of people who care deeply about Elsie and work diligently for its well-being. We all feel very appreciative of our mayor, Marge Doerr, and for all those who give of their time to serve on our Village and Zoning Boards.

HEF owns two properties in Elsie. One is Farley's Music Hall, a two-story structure that we restored after the flood of 1993. It is used for various community functions and is available to rent for special events. This spring we plan to complete some projects such as attic insulation, repainting of the ceiling in the main hall, and renovating a small upstairs room to serve as our office. Our other property is the old ice house ruin which we have stabilized and continue to maintain.

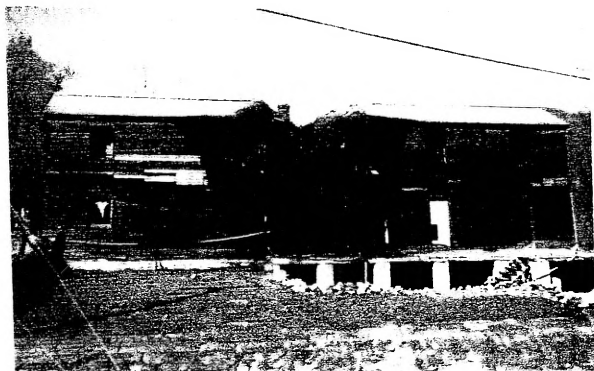
Financially we are sound. Selling the Mott Building in 2000 helped us to put aside funds for future needs. As of December 31, 2002, we had \$10,337.69 in our checking account, \$43,460.27 in our savings account, and \$17,863.32 in mutual funds. Since the interest from these accounts does not cover our expenses, we rely heavily on memberships and other contributions. Our expenses include the maintenance of Farley's Music Hall, the publishing of our newsletters and other materials, and general operating expenses. In 2002 we had an income of \$7,264.97 and our expenses totaled \$8,049.99.

I first joined the HEF board in 1988 when co-founder and president, Dr. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., asked me to be secretary-treasurer. I continued in that position until 2000. Now, as president, I find myself thinking about our purpose and our vision. How can we be most effective? How can we best serve this community? How can we most efficiently utilize the funds available to us? How can we develop additional streams of income?

Over the past 32 years HEF has published many books, pamphlets and articles. It was instrumental in developing and establishing an effective zoning ordinance; it took the steps necessary to have Elsie placed on the National Register of Historic Places; it restored two historic buildings —the Village Hall and Farley's Music Hall; it stabilized the old ice house ruin; and it helps to maintain the Village of Elsie Museum.

A few days before writing this report we had a fire in Elsie. It saddens me to have to report that this fire caused extensive damage to the old Union Hotel (see item under Village Happenings). In line with our purpose of preserving Elsie's historic buildings, we will be exploring ways in which we can help the owner, Nancy McDow, as she struggles to make difficult decisions about the future of this historical treasure. I know we all have many opportunities to cherish this special village and will do our best to make the most of them. ❖

—Marie Oleson
president and guest editor for
this issue of *Elsie History*



The Union Hotel, April 2, 2003, the day after the fire
Photo by Mary Anne Schmidt

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

January 1, 2003

I thoroughly enjoyed the recent newsletter, all about the Sprague family. I grew up with them in the University City church. I never knew Helen well at that time, but Florence was my Sunday school teacher for a while. Back then I didn't know anything about their connection with the Elsah area.

Helen's father, Warren Sprague, and my father, Norman Lewis, shared an office building in downtown St. Louis. My father's advertising agency was in the front, and Clark-Sprague Printing was in the back. They worked closely on lots of business....

I liked John Williams' letter giving us a good picture of current and future projects. Glad you voted to not raise the dues. The report of the Workshop on Historic Zoning was certainly interesting, too.

Lorraine Passmore, Liberty Corners, NJ

January 10, 2003:

I have indeed been enjoying the Elsah newsletters, and hope to visit again soon.... I was a bit concerned to read about the debate over whether to place a bus parking lot along the River Road entrance & certainly hope that doesn't occur. Difficult to halt "progress," I suppose.

Valerie Tucker, Kirkland, WA

VILLAGE HAPPENINGS

Paul Williams visits Elsah: Paul Williams, co-author of the Elsah Guidebook and co-founder of HEF, shared his Elsah experiences with an attentive audience on April 11. He spoke about *Putting together the Elsah Guidebook—research, luck and good fortune*. Dr. Williams is in Elsah as a visiting professor of English at Principia College for spring quarter. He currently lives in California.

Union Hotel damaged by fire: Tuesday evening, April 1, the old Union Hotel on LaSalle Street suffered extensive damage as the result of a fire that broke out about 10:00 pm. The building, owned by Ms. Nancy McDow, was built around 1860 and has been in the McDow family since 1881. Nancy's father, Dewey McDow, and his brothers and sisters were born in the building and grew up there. "Miss Lucy," Nancy's aunt lived there all her life.

Elsah Village Trustees election:

Tuesday, April 1, 2003 was voting day in Elsah. On the ballot for four-year terms on the Village Board were five contenders for three places: Mark Badasch, Paula Bradley, Merlin Lewis, Robert Pennamon, and Lynn Schreiber. The two definite winners were Schreiber and Lewis. But there was a tie between Badasch and Pennamon; they each received 38 votes. A lottery was held two days later, using ping-pong balls – one orange and one white. Bob Rockabrand, retiring senior Trustee, reached in a paper bag and pulled out the winner's ball – the color that had been chosen by Mark Badasch. David Haslam ran unopposed to fill an unexpired two-year term—and won. In addition, voters decided on two public questions: 1) Shall large tour buses be allowed on LaSalle Street? The vote was 24 yes and 50 no. And 2) Shall a viewing platform be built near the phone booth/parking lot at the riverfront of the village? The vote was 20 yes and 53 no. This was a non-binding referendum. Forty-one percent of the 191 registered voters voted.

Members of the Elsah Village Board: Mark Badasch, Karen Dearborn, David Haslam, Merlin Lewis, Ed Lewitz, Lynn Schreiber, and the mayor, Marge Doerr. The village clerk is Jeralyn Lewitz.

Members of the Elsah Zoning Board: Paula Bradley, Jim Brandon, Bill Flatley, Edith List, Ingeborg Mack, Sandy Stack, and the chair, Eric Schreiber.

Elsah Museum photo contest: From July 12th to Aug. 31st the Museum will hold its fourth Annual Photography Exhibit "Elsah: To Every Season." The first-place prize will be purchased by the Museum for \$150. Entries must be received by July 1st, either at the Museum during open hours or by mail at P.O. Box 28, Elsah, IL 62028. The museum is open from 1 to 4 pm, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, April through October.

A big 50th: Bert Vandermark, a life member of HEF, celebrated his 50th birthday in February with a party in the Civic Center. Attending were many villagers, folks from St. Louis, where the Vandermark family lived prior to their move to Elsah, and Bert's brother and family from Holland. Festivities included a barbershop quartet, table games, dinner catered by My Just Desserts, and tributes to Bert.

A Keller visitor:



(photo courtesy of J. Lewitz)

Daniel Keller, of French background though living in England, is related to the Edward Keller family. This winter he spent some time in the area, including the village. At the January meeting of the HEF Board he told of his research into family history which led him to Elsah, and he expressed his views on the origin of Elsah's name: ELSASS — the German word for Alsace, where the Keller family came from. He also shared some ideas on possible future activities that may be of interest to us. The Museum Committee enjoyed Daniel's company at its monthly meeting, and Jim Schmidt tape-recorded an interview with him.

Christmas Sing: The traditional Elsah Christmas Sing took place on Sunday, December 16th, at the two Elsah churches. The program was followed by delicious refreshments at Farley's that many members of the community had contributed. In late November Margaret and George Cooke had held a wedding reception for their daughter in the main hall, with strings of Christmas lights wound around the track lighting. The lighting was still in place for the Sing, and it made the hall sparkle.

Folk Dance in Farley's: Last October 5th Farley's came alive with music and dancing. Lynn & Eric Schreiber and others arranged with a group from West Virginia to provide the music for an evening of folk dancing that filled the building with villagers, out-of-towners, and even a few Principia College students. 'Twas much fun. To follow up on that fun, HEF will be sponsoring square dance lessons this fall (see calendar on page 12).

Make-a-Difference Day: On Saturday, October 19, 2002, students from Marquette High School in Alton responded to President Bush's call upon Americans to remember the events of September 11, 2001, through community service. Nine students came to Elsah and worked on projects for HEF and the Village. One group helped fill and level the foundation of the ice house on Mill Street with a special type of gravel. A second group cleared trash from the creek, from Fountain Square Park to the river. Then they all cleaned Farley's Music Hall, washing windows, wiping the walls, dusting and mopping, and moving heavy items. HEF members Betty Clark, Ed Lewitz, and John Williams supervised the students. In between their tasks, the young people were treated to ice cream and soda at Jeremiah's.

A visit from the Eigners: Elsah was happy to see Jan and Joe Eigner again, though the occasion was a not-too-happy one. They came from Santa Fe to gather with family members and friends in the Elsah cemetery on September 12, 2002, for a memorial service for their daughter, Naomi. A reception at Farley's followed. The Eigners plan to return when the gravestone is ready to be set in place.

Cronin home refreshed: In August of 2002 June & Bob Cronin's home at the end of Mill Street (actually Cemetery Road) received somewhat of a changeover. The old shingles on the upper portion of the face of the house were replaced with cedar siding with a half-round design, and the old shingles on the upper portion of the other three sides were replaced with cedar siding similar to the lower portion of the house. The house was painted and now has a nice fresh look.

Elsah Sesquicentennial – 1853 to 2003: The Village Board is discussing ideas for a celebration of Elsah's 150th year. Proposals include: a banner at each end of town, a parade with dignitaries invited, a potluck followed by a talent show or storytelling time, an ice cream social, a contra dance in the street, a time capsule, a souvenir coin. Plans at first were to have it coincide with July 4th, but instead there will be the usual Fourth of July potluck, and the Sesquicentennial Celebration will be in the fall. HEF will get in on the act with a House Tour in late September.

Elsah Business Association: For the past two years Elsah has had a business association, which started out as a Tourist Committee. Presently it is comprised of the Corner Nest, the Green Tree Inn, the Maple Leaf Cottage Inn, My Just Desserts, elsahArt, and Crocker & Springer Salt-Glazed Stoneware. It has sponsored several activities in Elsah: two Car Classics, two December House Tours, and two "Celebration of the Arts." The latter has featured art exhibits, violinists Erin & Ben Schreiber, dulcimer music, Principia's a cappella group called "+1", Neil Werries' musical group "Elsah," a strolling jazz band, a clown, a petting zoo, and Irish Step Dancers.

UPCOMING HEF ACTIVITIES – *Mark your calendar.*

Friday, May 2:

Randall Bauer - guitar & vocal concert featuring his travel songs and stories of the road... 7:30 pm, Farley's Music Hall, refreshments; \$5 donation

Saturday, May 3 (rain date May 10):

Tour of the Eliestoun Estate and the Woolly Mammoth dig site –10:30 am to 2:30 pm Principia College campus. Free for HEF members and their families

Sunday, May 4

Reception for HEF board member, Gil Ives, and his new bride, Betty MacDonald — 1:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon. Farley's Music Hall

Friday, May 16:

Tim Tomlinson – illustrated talk on The Chautauqua Movement, 7:30 pm, Farley's Music Hall, refreshments

Tuesday, May 20:

Monthly Board meeting, 7 pm, Farley's

Tuesday, June 17:

Monthly Board meeting, 7 pm, Farley's

Saturday, July 26:

House Tour for Principia Summer Sessioners and HEF members only, 10 am to 12 noon; free for HEF members, \$10 non-members

Looking ahead to autumn:

Square dancing! Everyone is welcome on the second Saturday of each month: September 13, October 11, November 8, and December 13. 7:30 pm, Farley's Music Hall. \$2.50 per person/\$5.00 per couple; refreshments

Sunday, September 28:

Sesquicentennial Celebration House Tour

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Welcome... to Donald Gibson--44A Mill St. (Kinder apt.)
and Farewell... to Cory Merrill--Alpa St. apt.; Lucy & Merlin Lewis --27 Mill St. (The Lewis family is nearby, however, just up the hill in White Oak subdivision. Stacie & Dan Schaefer & little Emma have moved down the street from 86 Mill into the house the Lewises vacated.)

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The purposes of Historic Elsah Foundation are stated in the Articles of Incorporation (1971): "...the preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, houses, architecture and culture of the Village of Elsah, Illinois, the historic areas, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets and periodicals regarding the Village, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and educational value of the Village.